



# The development agency of the future

## Fit for protracted crises?

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### Abstract

Humanitarian crises, today and in the future, will continue to pose complex, costly and persistent problems that will not be solved through short-term or incremental measures or approaches that fail to question the structures, sectors and silos in place in donor aid agencies. Donors, in particular, need to re-examine their structures, policies and approaches and create a shared space where both humanitarian and development actors can co-exist and apply different approaches and tools to address the range of problems protracted crises entail.

This report identifies the numerous conceptual, architectural and political divides that prevent effective linkages between humanitarian and development aid, and offers options for donor aid agencies to better understand and reconcile these differences within their own institutions and beyond.

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# Executive summary

Humanitarian assistance, which is often predicated on emergency relief, is in practice overwhelmingly long-term in response to protracted and recurrent crises. In 2014, more than 90% of countries with annual humanitarian appeals had had such appeals for three or more years, and 60% for more than eight years. While humanitarian assistance is designed to be stop-gap and short term, humanitarian activities have, by default, expanded into recovery and basic service provision in protracted crises, where extreme, widespread and unpredictable needs exist alongside long-term structural vulnerabilities, and where there are major barriers to scaling up development funding and activities.

This expanding humanitarian remit has affected donors as protracted crises consume more and more of their limited capacities and funds. The need for humanitarian aid is outpacing donor funding to such a degree that donors are only able to contribute 50–60% of requirements each year.

Since the 1990s donors have tried to increase the effectiveness of aid in protracted crisis situations by improving the links between humanitarian and development objectives and activities, through initiatives aimed at Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD), building ‘resilience’ and stabilising fragile states. However, such approaches have failed to improve these links or realise their transformational potential on the ground.

Despite decades of reflection, increasing financial pressure and a near-universal awareness of the need to change, donors still face considerable obstacles to linking different forms of assistance and realising the efficiency and effectiveness such links would bring. Such obstacles include:

- enduring conceptual divides, including different imperatives, approaches and levels at which humanitarian and development actors operate;
- bifurcated architecture across structures, strategies, decision-making and budgets that limits coherent visioning, planning and action;
- misaligned policy and practice including an inability to effect a strategic and coherent division of labour across humanitarian and development departments;
- low risk tolerance for the types of innovative and often unmeasurable approaches linking short- and long-term initiatives requires;
- lack of career incentives and human resource practices that encourage coordination, and working across functions and departments;
- political pressure to do what is politically necessary and feasible, rather than what is required by needs, or to use humanitarian relief as a means of avoiding more substantial engagement in difficult contexts.

Donors are beginning to address the unhelpful divides within their own institutions by developing cross-governmental structures, strategies and funding instruments that seek to integrate humanitarian and development responses and bridge aid, security and peacebuilding. They have also developed different strategies for building more flexibility into their funding schemes and filling what they perceive are the gaps in funding for transition activities. However, such efforts have been more about technical solutions than fundamental change.

Humanitarian crises, today and in the future, will continue to pose complex, costly and persistent problems that will not be solved through short-term or incremental measures or approaches that fail to question the structures, sectors and silos already in place in donor aid agencies. Adapting donor structures, practices and behaviours to address the specific needs of protracted crises requires that the donor aid agency of the future:

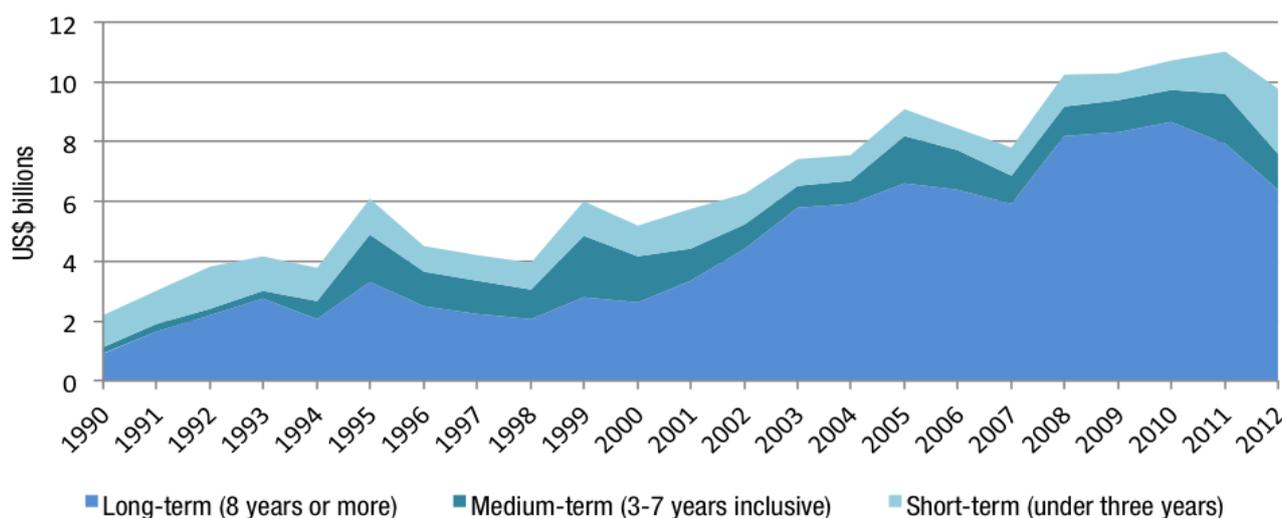
- recognises that the purpose of aid in protracted crises is not to further national interests, but to end the cycle of vulnerability and stress for people and the institutions that support them;
- is transparent about the interrelation between politics, security, economics and development when making decisions about humanitarian priorities and funds, preserves humanitarian space when it is needed and brings the full skills, capacities and weight of governments to bear on protracted crises when coherence is called for;
- bridges architectural divides within donor institutions and partners by aligning strategies, processes and tools with the problems aid aims to address;
- promotes strategic and operational coherence across humanitarian and development departments;
- aligns performance and career incentives with coherent programme objectives;
- shifts from a centralised to a decentralised model of decision-making and action that enables more local responses to crises;
- develops and promotes a combination of proactive and reactive funding and financing tools and alternative forms of financing to encompass public, private and civil society actors;
- recognises that finding solutions to protracted crises is fundamentally a political issue that requires the full extent of political will, courage, capacity and resources of donor governments.

# 1. Aid in protracted crisis: short-term solutions to long-term problems

Humanitarian assistance, which is often predicated on emergency relief, is in practice overwhelmingly long-term in response to protracted and recurrent crises. In 2014, more than 90% of countries with annual humanitarian appeals had had them for three or more years; 60% had had annual appeals for more than eight years, including long-running relief programmes in Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia and northern Kenya (Swithern, 2014). The average amount of time people are living in displacement is now a staggering 17 years (IDMC, 2014). According to the United Nations, protracted crises affect an estimated 366 million people worldwide (FAO, 2014).

Protracted crises are defined as being when a significant proportion of the population is vulnerable to death, disease or disruption of their livelihoods over a long period of time.<sup>1</sup> Such situations are often complicated by violence and natural disasters such as flooding and drought (Harmer and Macrae, 2004). Protracted crises result in a mixture of acute and long-term needs, often combining high levels of malnutrition, mortality and disease alongside high and chronic levels of poverty, food insecurity and a lack of economic opportunity.

Figure 1: Long, medium and short-term recipients of official humanitarian assistance from DAC donors 1990-2012



Source: *Development Initiatives*, based on OECD-DAC data.

1 In 2010, FAO and WFP, as part of their State of Food Insecurity in the World 2010 report, defined protracted crises as countries reporting a food crisis for eight years or more, receiving more than 10% of foreign assistance as humanitarian relief, and being on the list of Low-Income Food-Deficit Countries. UNHCR defines protracted displacement as situations in which refugees have been in exile for five years or more since their initial displacement, and in which immediate prospects for solutions are bleak.

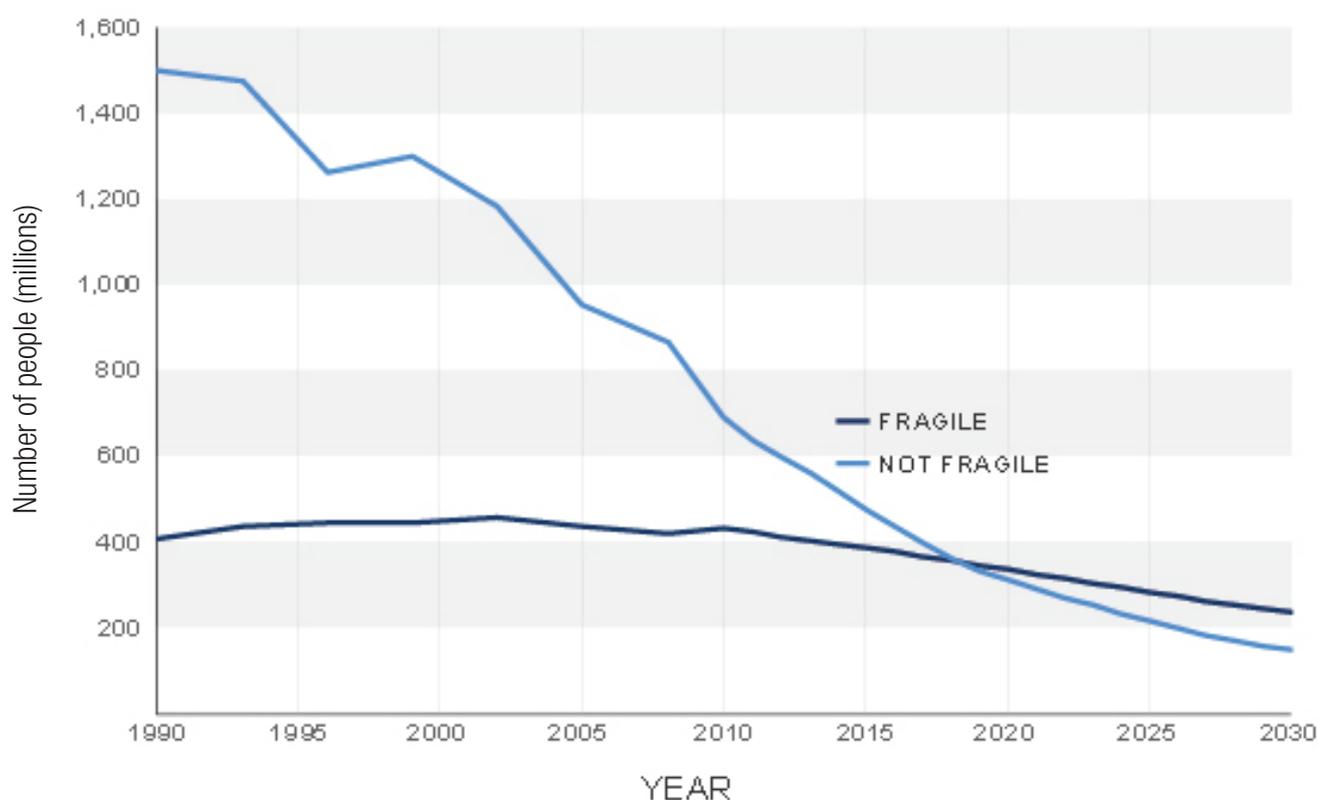
The connections between humanitarian crises and development are well known and well documented. In 2013, 78% of humanitarian funding went to countries with high levels of poverty, low government spending and limited domestic capacity. Of the 30 countries categorised as long-term recipients of humanitarian assistance during the past 15 years, 25 were classified as fragile states in 2013 (Swithern, 2014). It is expected that by 2030, two-thirds of the world's poor will be living fragile and conflict-affected states where the record of and prospects for poverty reduction are weakest, (Chandy et al., 2013). Donors are, in principle, preparing to increase their development investment in these settings. For example, the World Bank is planning to increase international development assistance to fragile and conflict affected states from 52% to 76% of overall assistance (World Bank, 2013).

According to humanitarian principles and commitments, humanitarian action in conflict or disaster situations should 'strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs' (Red Cross Code

of Conduct, 1994), and humanitarian assistance must be provided in ways that support recovery and long-term development (GHD, 2003). In theory, this is meant to be accomplished through early and limited interventions designed to jump-start recovery and basic services and facilitate a 'transition' from a focus on life-saving needs led by international actors to recovery, development and long-term planning with governments in the lead.

In practice, however, humanitarian activities – and aspirations – have, by default, expanded into recovery and basic service provision, particularly in protracted crises, where extreme, widespread and unpredictable needs exist alongside long-term structural vulnerabilities, an absence of government support and where there are major barriers to scaling up development funding and activities (Mosel and Levine, 2014). In such circumstances humanitarian activities include long-term health, nutrition and education, food assistance, livelihoods support and social protection measures designed to provide social safety nets and reduce vulnerability to future crises and shocks.

**Figure 2: Number of people in poverty: fragile states vs stable countries, official estimates and baseline scenario**



Source: Brookings Institution, 2013.

Despite this additional focus, humanitarian assistance is inevitably stop-gap by design, and therefore limited in its ability to meet the range of needs protracted crises involve. Humanitarian coordination structures, mechanisms and tools are more attuned to short-term, time-bound interventions; humanitarian approaches are not set up to handle deep-rooted structural problems; and humanitarian organisations do not have adequate capacity or the full range of skills to address the fundamental problems of poverty, vulnerability and fragility that put people in crisis in the first place.

Humanitarian action is also limited by resources. In 2013, humanitarian funding totalled \$17 billion – less than 10% of official development assistance (ODA) and funds are often channelled to address acute needs in large-scale high-profile crises, often at the expense of long-simmering crises where needs are chronic. In 2013, more than 30% of humanitarian funding went to support responses to large-scale ‘Level 3’ emergencies, redirecting funds, for example from much-needed long-term primary healthcare in the DRC to address the very substantial and acute needs in the crisis in Syria (Poole, 2013).

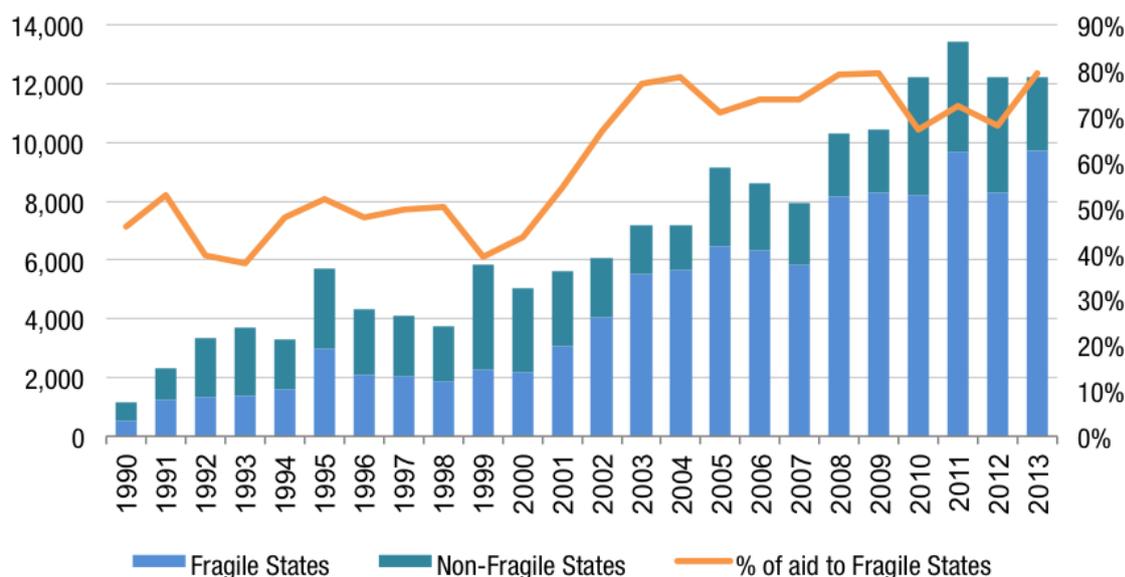
The expanding remit of humanitarian action also affects donors as large-scale crises consume more and more of their limited capacities and funds, and as their partners, including UN agencies and NGOs, call for faster, more

flexible and more predictable funding and core support to undertake an ever growing range of tasks. The need for humanitarian aid is outpacing donor funding to such a degree that donors are only able to contribute 50–60% of requirements (Zyck and Krebs, 2014).

Some of the financial pressure has been offset by the growing prominence of countries such as India, China and the Gulf States, religious charities and private sector organisations, which are becoming more substantial supporters of humanitarian action.<sup>2</sup> However, these actors do not offer the levels and predictability of funding required for responses to protracted emergencies. For example, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have tended to limit their assistance to high-profile crises in the Middle East region at times of peak need versus being consistent and impartial supporters of humanitarian action overall (Binder and Meier, 2011). Funds from private businesses correlate with business opportunity and often ebb and flow with crisis visibility and media attention (Zyck and Kent, 2013).

Since the 1990s, donors have been looking at creating programmatic and financial efficiencies through better integration of humanitarian and development objectives and activities, for example under the umbrella of risk reduction through the Yokohama Strategy (1990) and the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005), or through

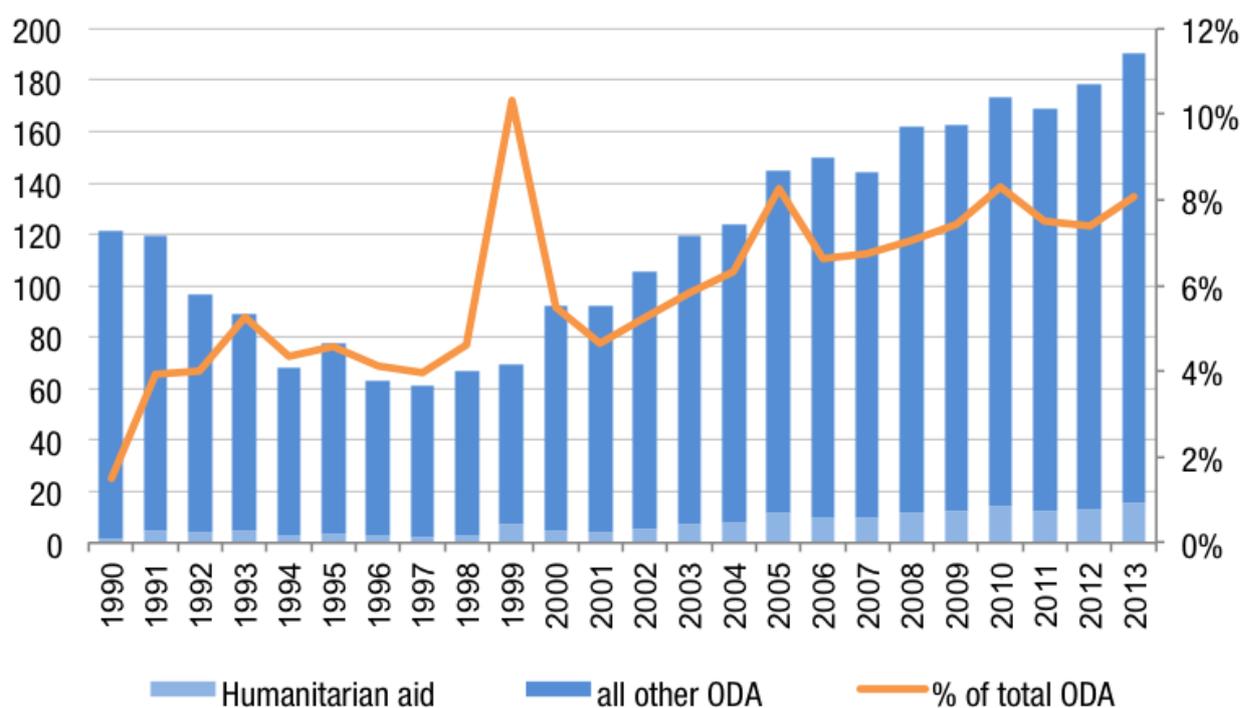
**Figure 3: Total humanitarian aid to fragile states**



Source: 1990-2010 OECD–DAC data representing total humanitarian aid to states classified as fragile in 2008. 2010-2014 OECD–DAC data representing total humanitarian aid to states classified as fragile in 2014.

2 For example, Development Initiatives estimates that humanitarian assistance by governments outside the OECD–DAC increased by 86% between 2011 and 2012 and by 58% between 2012 and 2013. Preliminary data for private sector contributions to humanitarian assistance in 2013 indicates a 35% rise from 2012 to an estimated US\$5.6 billion.

Figure 4: All donors' humanitarian funding vs total ODA funding (US\$bn), 2013 constant prices



Source: Development Initiatives based on OECD–DAC, UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) data.

initiatives specifically designed to link relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD).<sup>3</sup> The concept of resilience, which came to prominence through the UK Department for International Development (DFID)'s Humanitarian Emergency Response Review in 2011, developed as an evolutionary side branch to this discussion. At the time it resonated with donors tired of providing aid to countries that never got back on their feet, and the concept has prompted some thinking around how to better integrate approaches to humanitarian and development aid. However, resilience is still regarded by some as another fad devoid of real meaning, or a buzzword to insert into proposals as a sure-fire way to secure funds (OECD, 2014). The transformational potential of the concept of resilience has not been realised in practice, and resilience 'projects' have sprung up as yet another uncoordinated layer outside of mainstream humanitarian or development analysis and planning.

The increased policy attention to fragile states, initially formalised with the adoption of the Fragile

States Principles (FSP) by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2007, evolved out of the Global War on Terror and its focus on using humanitarian and development activities to 'stabilise' fragile states such as Afghanistan, Liberia and Yemen. It has since given rise to efforts by donors to link political, security, development and humanitarian objectives and activities, including through 'whole of government' approaches that seek to address security, state-building and development in poorly performing countries through more joined-up institutional and funding arrangements. While there are indications that this may have resulted in some improved internal coordination (Below and Belzile, 2013), there are signs of increased fragmentation at country level where whole of government and stabilisation structures and funds are being applied.<sup>4</sup> More analysis is needed to determine whether such approaches have improved country-level support in complex and protracted crisis settings.

3 For an overview of the literature, see Buchanan-Smith and Maxwell (1994); Buchanan-Smith and Fabbri (2005); Harmer and Macrae (2004); Steets (2011); and Otto and Weingärtner (2013).

4 Personal communication.

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Using short-term measures to address long-term problems in protracted crises is neither desirable nor sustainable. This implies that donors need to re-examine their approaches and create a shared space where both humanitarian and development actors can co-exist and apply different approaches and tools to address the range of problems such contexts entail. This requires answering the following questions:

- What are the problems responses to protracted crises seek to address? How will donors help to achieve these objectives, including through their various instruments and tools?
- How can coherence be brought to institutional objectives, vocabulary, principles and approaches in support of such requirements?
- How can incentives and operating principles be aligned to better support planning, risk management, coordination and decision-making in long-term crises?
- What skills, capacities and partnerships are required?
- How can funding policies and financial instruments help?

Governments must be pushed to explicitly recognise the importance of relief-to-development connections and the imperative for governments, donors and aid agencies to do better at linking strategies, policies, actions and funds across developing countries and in fragile situations. The new risk reduction framework agreement agreed at Sendai in March 2015 fell short in this regard by omitting an explicit commitment to supporting the ability of states to adapt their development processes so that they are less exposed to shocks. It also does not commit additional funding for its long-term risk reduction agenda.

The Financing for Development Conference to be held in Addis Ababa in July 2015 will be vital in increasing resource commitments to improve resilience and responses to shocks. The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, including a High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing to be formed this year, represents an opportunity to build on the outcomes of these processes and rethink how the humanitarian architecture and financing mechanisms might complement these emerging development paradigms.

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# 2. What is getting in the way?

Despite broad agreement that addressing protracted crises requires the right mix and strategic use of treatments and tools that tackle a range of short-term needs and long-term vulnerabilities simultaneously and in complementary ways (OECD, 2009), the gap between rhetoric and reality remains stubbornly wide.

Donors still face significant difficulties in linking their different forms of assistance, and despite a new focus on efficiency, accountability and value for money, they have not been able to adjust their approaches or structures to make the most efficient and effective use of the limited resources they have. The challenges vary from donor to donor, depending on domestic politics, institutional arrangements and organisational culture, the size of their civil service and the depth of their pockets. However, there are a few clear obstacles that are common to most.

## 2.1 Enduring conceptual divides

Humanitarian assistance and development cooperation have distinct origins. The international humanitarian architecture evolved out of an imperative to assist the victims of conflict in the first and second world wars and is premised on the delivery of immediate, life-saving assistance to individuals and communities based on need and independent of state objectives or strictures. This is particularly true in conflict situations where humanitarians may actively pursue ‘state-avoiding’ approaches (Poole, 2015). The humanitarian imperative does not include any commitment to transform the underlying causes of crises or vulnerability.

Development cooperation, by contrast, seeks longer-term solutions to poverty reduction and societal transformation, and works largely through governments and state institutions.

The challenge of linking humanitarian and development agendas and funds is therefore not merely a temporal or a technical one, but a conceptual one that involves reconciling the different imperatives, approaches and levels at which humanitarian and development actors operate.

However, distinctions must be made where such coherence is neither feasible nor desirable, particularly in sensitive and complex conflict situations where states are parties to the conflict or engaged in human rights abuses, and where the application of international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles should be applied.

## 2.2 Bifurcated architecture

The enduring bifurcation of humanitarian and development assistance across strategies, decision-making and budgets also limits coherent visioning, planning and action. For example, despite an evolution from the LRRD model, which aims to link relief and development agendas in temporal terms, to an aid ‘contiguum’ and the simultaneous presence of humanitarian and development needs and responses, some donors, notably the United States and the European Union (EU), maintain separate humanitarian and development teams with distinct portfolios, remits and reporting lines. While many donors have integrated humanitarian and development structures at capital level, only some, notably the United Kingdom, Sweden and Australia, have extended such integration to embassies and country offices. Where whole of government approaches have prompted the creation of interdepartmental coordination committees and dedicated funds, for example inter-ministerial coordination committees in the UK, Canada and Denmark, such cross-over mechanisms still focus on connecting disparate agendas and structures, rather than enabling truly holistic responses.

Such bifurcation also extends to prioritisation and decision-making, as humanitarian budgets remain distinct and allocation decisions are largely separate from those of development counterparts. For example, for most donors humanitarian policymaking and funding decisions are centralised within humanitarian departments in donor capitals, whereas development decisions are largely devolved to embassies and country offices. So while humanitarian departments draw upon the analysis and advice of embassies, where they exist, decision-making is often independent of the strategic priorities identified in country strategies or longer-term development plans. Donors argue that division of the humanitarian pot at the global level is necessary to support an impartial, needs-based approach (Poole, 2014), but also concede that such a system allows humanitarian departments to maintain control of critical – and limited – humanitarian funds.

Conversely, development allocations to protracted crises are based on the priorities identified by the state and macro-economic targets, and are often greatly influenced by what was provided the previous year, rather than by an ongoing assessment of in-country needs and vulnerabilities (Steets, 2011).

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Interestingly, such architectural divisions in traditional donor structures do not exist among newly emerging donors, for example the United Arab Emirates and Brazil, whose aid agencies reflect their view of humanitarian giving as part of a larger package of aid (Barber, 2014). More analysis is needed to determine whether this results in more effective, appropriate or coherent aid in protracted crisis circumstances.

### 2.3 Misaligned policy and practice

The difficulty for humanitarians operating in protracted crises also stems from a misalignment of the policies and expectations that govern humanitarian and development action and what happens in practice. For one, inconsistent definitions and interpretations for concepts such as ‘relief’, ‘recovery’ and ‘resilience’ have made it difficult to articulate the strengths and limits of humanitarian activities and funds in protracted crises, establish a clear division of labour between humanitarian and development partners and more clearly identify ways in which development actors might work earlier and more flexibly in crisis contexts.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, donors are expected to uphold commitments to a range of often competing global aid commitments and good practices, which encourage harmonisation of humanitarian, development and, in some cases, security priorities, but at the same time call for international support to national priorities, processes and institutions alongside commitments to upholding neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action led by international actors.<sup>6</sup> As a result, donor development cooperation priorities often run counter to the requirements of operating in protracted contexts, which might involve working in countries or areas of countries or programmatic sectors that are not in line with host government priorities.

Donors’ own policies and practices in support of integrated humanitarian/development approaches often do not align with their expectations of partners. For example, multi-mandated NGOs working to adopt a more holistic approach to programming feel pressure from donors to dress up programmes to meet donor expectations of ‘humanitarian’ and ‘development’ distinctions and to finance development-like programming in difficult environments using humanitarian funds.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.4 Low risk tolerance

Traditional donor practices do not encourage risk-taking and donors vary in their appetite for risk, which makes some of the more innovative approaches to linking short- and long-term initiatives difficult to realise (OECD, 2014). Domestic politics favours low-risk, high-return activities that promote visibility, play well with constituencies and align with larger foreign policy agendas. Bureaucratic requirements follow rigid reporting and accountability requirements that are focused on outputs and not outcomes. Incentive structures do not reward preparedness, early action or disaster risk reduction, all of which are hard to define, measure and justify, particularly when there are greater incentives to respond to a crisis than avert one.<sup>8</sup> Counter-terrorism legislation and concerns around inadvertent funding of terrorist organisations as part of aid allocations are also pushing donors towards low-risk options and partners (Macintosh and Duplat, 2013). Current approaches to protracted crises in particular focus on excessive risk avoidance, particularly for aid agencies themselves, rather than on the risks to civilians within the host population (Collinson, Duffield et al., 2013).

### 2.5 Lack of career incentives

Human resource practices and career development frameworks within donor organisations discourage staff from coordinating and working across functions and departments (OECD, 2014). Staff are recruited for their sectoral or geographic expertise and are either not given opportunities to work cross-functionally, or are asked to work across a range of capacities without the requisite expertise. Staff are discouraged from taking risks by being rewarded for initiatives that fit within existing structures and can bring quick and visible results to government initiatives. Career development in many donors discourages job transfers between departments or skills development across functions in favour of well-worn career paths that develop narrow specialisations and single-track expertise. Human resource practices require longer timeframes for recruiting development versus humanitarian staff, and there are few incentives to attract qualified staff to work in protracted crises or fragile states. Performance management frameworks do not include indicators for coordination or working cross-functionally.<sup>9</sup>

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5 Such ideas have come out of the Future Humanitarian Financing (FHF) initiative and associated discussions.

6 For example, there are inherent tensions between the neutral and impartial approaches promoted by the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles (2003), the state-building objectives of the Fragile States Principles (2011) and the principles of national ownership and leadership in the Paris Declaration (2005), the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) and the Hyogo Framework for Action II (2015).

7 Personal communication.

8 This is despite some evidence that investment in resilience will bring substantial returns in terms of needs averted and broader developmental outcomes (DFID, 2013).

9 All donor representatives interviewed for this study raised this issue as contributing to the conceptual divide within their organisations.

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This results in a lack of sophisticated understanding of the complex contexts, ways of working and partnerships of different types of aid precisely where humanitarian and development links are most needed. This is particularly true at field level, where embassies are largely staffed by political or consular officers who are often unfamiliar with crisis response.

## **2.6 Political pressures**

Politically, humanitarian action has been used implicitly and explicitly by governments, notably Gulf donors, as a useful source of influence (GPPI, 2011). Political pressure comes from donor country parliaments, auditors, the public and the media, where the pressure to do something, for example in response to the Ebola virus in West Africa, comes at the expense of less high-profile crises, or where ever-increasing public questions and scrutiny over the effectiveness and impact of aid budgets inhibit risk-taking. Some donors interviewed for this study conceded that, because humanitarian assistance is more correlated with media attention and reputational risk than other forms of aid, ministers feel compelled to do what is politically necessary and feasible, rather than what is required by the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the situation, or to use humanitarian relief as a means of avoiding more substantial engagement in difficult contexts (Harmer and Macrae, 2004).

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# 3. What needs to change?

In 2012, a summary of OECD–DAC humanitarian assistance peer reviews highlighted the need to improve coordination between humanitarian and development instruments and to review the sometimes cumbersome procedures, lack of predictability and flexibility and short funding timeframes that restrict holistic responses in protracted crisis situations (OECD, 2012).

Donors are beginning to address the unhelpful divides within their own institutions by developing cross-governmental structures, strategies and funding instruments that seek to integrate humanitarian and development responses and bridge aid, security and peacebuilding. For example, most OECD-DAC donor governments, including the newest member, the United Arab Emirates, have developed or are in the process of developing cross-government policies and strategies that guide both humanitarian and development responses, and now often include stabilisation and foreign policy considerations.

Donors have also developed different strategies for building more flexibility into their funding schemes and filling what they perceive are the gaps in funding for transition activities. These have included creating specialised funds or budget lines; pooling funding lines or increasing their flexibility; and earmarking a share of humanitarian and/or development funding for recovery or transition. Initiatives have included both politically-driven stabilisation tools, such as the European Commission’s Instrument for Stability, DFID’s Conflict Pool and mechanisms such as the Swiss parliament’s earmarking of 30% of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)’s humanitarian budget for recovery and reconstruction, multi-year funding and the development of ‘modifiers’ to allow for small alterations in budget allocations when situations change on the ground.

While approaches like these are steps in the right direction, they have tried to address systemic shortcomings by doing what is pragmatic and feasible within the limits of current aid models. However, addressing the complex range of needs and vulnerabilities in protracted crises is not simply about technical solutions; rather, it means challenging and changing the underlying assumptions, interests and incentives of donor behavior, including by:

## 3.1 Finding common conceptual ground

Addressing the challenges in effectively dealing with protracted crises requires abandoning ‘humanitarian’ and ‘development’ labels and perspectives and finding commonality in objectives, principles and approaches to commonly identified problems, where commonality makes sense, as well as clearly identifying where such concepts diverge and should remain distinct. This requires a more nuanced understanding of where humanitarian principles are operationally relevant in protracted crises, and where they may be counter-productive in cases where a cohesive strategy and mix of approaches, tools and actors may be required. While some have argued that ‘it is only at the sharp end of the stick of acute crises that the distinctions between relief, recovery and resilience are distinguishable’ (Kent, 2012), others point to instances where an open-ended approach to aligning these agendas allows for widely varying interpretations and applications of core humanitarian tenets and raises deep-seated ambiguities around actively linking relief with both development and security policy (Harmer and Macrae, 2004).

The OECD has been one of the key organisations encouraging donors to align the conceptual, strategic and technical links between political, security and development objectives (specifically under FSP # 5), and many donors have created cross-departmental strategies and structures that combine and aim to harmonise the work of all relevant departments involved in foreign assistance. For example, the Australian government, under the newly formed Department of Foreign Assistance and Trade (DFAT), is in the process of developing a new humanitarian strategy, which will draw together, under one policy framework, the different elements of DFAT’s engagement, specifically preparedness, response, advocacy, DRR, stabilisation and recovery work. In doing so the strategy will ensure a more coherent approach to working in these areas by the Humanitarian Division and the department more broadly. In addition, whole of government approaches have prompted the development of the DFID Stabilisation Unit, the Danish Whole of Government Board and the Canadian Stabilisation and Reconstruction Task Force (START – see Box 1), all of which have been formed as cross-governmental structures with sufficient coordination and decision-making power to oversee and align concepts and strategies at a high level.

In practice, however, donors concede that such high-level strategies and structures have yet to translate into joined-up ways of working that both exploit the know-how and expertise across different departments

and address head-on the inherent trade-offs in reconciling humanitarian, development, political and security agendas. More discussion, analysis and transparency is needed among donors concerning the dilemmas, priorities, trade-offs and possible consequences of such integrated approaches (OECD, 2011a).

Conceptual dilemmas extend to the challenges of reconciling the micro and macro approaches to aid that distinguish between development and humanitarian action. In some protracted crises such a dichotomy might be erased by linking community-driven humanitarian interventions with state-enabling development approaches under a coherent strategy. However, in situations of active conflict or human rights violations, linking aid strategies and approaches across governments, civil society and communities may prove to be counterproductive or dangerous. Again, more analysis is needed to determine the strengths and limits of coherent approaches to assistance, particularly in conflict contexts.

Finally, ensuring conceptual coherence is also about reconciling cultural differences between humanitarian and development approaches and staff. Interviews with donor representatives for this study pointed to an enduring and caricatured culture clash between undisciplined and unaccountable humanitarian ‘cowboys’ and their slow and unresponsive development counterparts, born primarily from a lack of understanding about each other’s approaches, mechanisms and tools. Such cultural differences, once recognised, can be addressed with incentives for bringing humanitarian and development teams together, and through lateral career moves that allow the development of skills and understanding of both sets of approaches, tools and cultures.

### **3.2 Find a more rational alignment of humanitarian and development remits, capacities and resources**

Addressing protracted crises in their entirety requires the right mix, and the strategic use, of treatments and tools that tackle the range of short-term needs and long-term vulnerabilities simultaneously and in complementary ways. This requires a clearer and more assertive articulation and acknowledgement of the benefits and limits of both humanitarian and development assistance in protracted situations, and a realignment of expectations, capacities and resources by donors. This does not mean restricting humanitarian action to immediate and short-term life-saving assistance, or limiting development initiatives to post-crisis development. Rather, it means finding a more rational alignment of aid requirements, capacities and activities in order to dial back humanitarian assistance and identify ways in which development actors might work earlier and more flexibly in crisis contexts. Such an

#### **Box 1: The Canadian government’s Stabilisation and Reconstruction Task Force (START)**

START was created in 2005 to coordinate Canadian funding policy, programming and operational responses to complex crises (conflicts or natural disasters). It links ‘CIDA humanitarian and long-term development assistance and National Defence and Canadian Force (DND) military and training assistance’, thus integrating humanitarian, development, stabilisation and political agendas under one instrument. In addition, in bringing together and aligning all government departments involved in stabilisation activities under a whole of government approach, START aims to improve coherence and efficiency at all phases of intervention (analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and review). In doing so, it allows each department and agency to play a unique but complementary role in stabilisation activities.

exercise would help in the adoption of a more realistic view of what humanitarian action and funds are able to achieve, targeting funds effectively and fostering a greater sense of shared responsibility among humanitarian and development actors for long-standing crises.

The spectre of a long-term displacement crisis in the Middle East is prompting donors to find new ways of integrating relief and development work through renewed efforts to come up with durable solutions for IDPs and refugees. The Solutions Alliance, a joint effort by the Danish and Colombian governments, the International Rescue Committee, UNDP and UNHCR, combines global and local-level partnerships and agendas to address protracted displacement situations. The initiative is premised on the concept that protracted displacement, predominately thought of as a humanitarian and human rights challenge, should be reframed as a development opportunity. The Alliance is working to put a vision and strategy in place for protracted displacement situations that is focused beyond short-term solutions and on development progress. The initiative is currently being tested in Somalia and Zambia.

The 3RP is a country-driven, but regionally coherent, plan to address refugee protection and humanitarian needs whilst building the resilience of vulnerable people and communities affected by the Syria crisis. The initiative includes an integrated multi-sector response in countries in the region (see Box 2).

These fledgling initiatives, though important, are as yet untested and merit further analysis and consideration.

### 3.3 Emphasise systems, not sectors

Protracted crises are about the underlying causes of vulnerability and how they relate to the wider political, social and economic context. However, both humanitarian and development approaches are focused on needs as the unit of measurement and sectors as the organising principle. Vulnerabilities are poorly understood and people vulnerable to crisis – not necessarily in crisis – are seldom targeted by humanitarian or development programming (Mosel and Levine, 2014). Efforts to address protracted crises would benefit from looking at future vulnerability alongside current needs and adopting an interdisciplinary approach that transcends traditional silos and sectors. This requires developing a common analysis and understanding of contexts across departments within donor institutions, and high-level strategies and planning and sequencing of operational priorities whether or not they fall into humanitarian or development responses. While there will always be trade-offs in meeting both short-term and long-term objectives with limited resources, such an approach would help to mitigate them.

Here, approaches that focus on risk and vulnerability would be useful, and there are signs that some initiatives, based on a ‘resilience model’, may be supporting a more appropriate division of labour among humanitarian, development and other actors, initiatives and funds (FHF, forthcoming).

For example, in 2013 the EU adopted a resilience strategy to bring together its humanitarian, development, disaster risk reduction and climate change efforts within a framework that sets out the different but collaborative roles and responsibilities of different actors, and encourages collaboration based on common analysis and complementary programmes (see Box 3). The USAID: Resilience in the Sahel-Enhanced (RISE) initiative aims to link humanitarian and development efforts in the Sahel to address the root causes of vulnerability in the region (Swithern, 2014).

The government of Ireland has initiated a development programme in Malawi that tackles some of the determinants of vulnerability, food insecurity and malnutrition through a combination of inter-related short- and medium-term interventions to tackle both acute malnutrition and underlying food security. The programme is designed to be internally coherent so as to engage and sequence initiatives from across Ireland’s political and aid capacities, and to be flexible and incremental in order to be responsive to uncertainty and emerging issues.

A newly launched OECD-DAC systems analysis tool, aimed at integrating resilience into both development and humanitarian programming, is designed to encourage governments, aid agencies, donors, INGOs and local organisations to develop a shared vision of both the risks

#### Box 2: The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP)

3RP was launched on 18 December 2014, with a two-year timeframe (2015–2016), to respond to the Syria refugee crisis. As a programme strategy, 3RP combines humanitarian responses to refugee protection and humanitarian needs with a development-oriented approach to strengthening resilience of individuals, households, communities and institutions. In doing so it brings together previously separate humanitarian and development work under one strategy. Secondly, 3RP is an inclusive, region-wide planning process. It draws together Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt’s national crisis response plans for humanitarian relief, resilience and stabilisation into a coordinated, regional strategy. Thirdly, 3RP represents a broad partnership platform, bringing together affected communities and their governments, donors and national and international development and humanitarian actors, facilitating joined-up planning, advocacy, fundraising, information management and monitoring activities.

that exist in their particular context, and a roadmap for future action. The tool has been used in eastern DRC and Lebanon; pilot initiatives in Somalia, Burundi, Mali and Bangladesh are currently under way.

Most of these initiatives are new and in the pilot/initial stages of implementation, so it is too early to tell whether they are proving effective. They should be monitored and analysed to understand how and to what extent they have been able to promote more joined-up ways of thinking and programming.

### 3.4 Further decentralise decision-making

Coherent approaches to protracted crises also require more joined-up and informed decision-making, including by devolving decision-making to field level, but donors have yet to translate the cross-governmental structures and strategies applied in capitals into coherent operating and decision-making on the ground.

Donors argue that there are good reasons for keeping humanitarian and development decision-making distinct and humanitarian budgets and priorities centrally controlled. Having a separate humanitarian budget and decision-making process allows for greater geographic flexibility to allocate funds to protracted crises, particularly where there is no established embassy presence, personnel or budget. Indeed, there is a genuine dilemma as to what

### Box 3: The EU Approach to Resilience

In 2013, the EU and its members adopted the 'EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises'. While the approach builds on previous efforts related to building long-term food security, including the SHARE (Supporting Horn of Africa Resilience) initiative and AGIR (Alliance Globale pour l'Initiative Résilience) in the Sahel, the updated approach includes other drivers of vulnerability, such as conflict, insecurity, weak democratic governance, economic shocks, natural hazards and climate change.

The approach differs from previous efforts by the EU and its members to link relief, recovery and development by moving away from the notion of a sequential 'handover' of responsibility, activities and resources from humanitarian and development actors to an approach that emphasises joint, complementary and continuous strategising, prioritisation, planning and programme implementation by humanitarian and development actors across activities and timeframes, and based on their comparative advantages.

While emphasising the importance of state responsibility for building resilience and supporting local institutions and structures, the approach acknowledges situations where alignment behind government-led strategies is not possible due to particularly weak governance or violent conflict, and calls for engagement with civil society partners in-country for implementing resilience approaches.

While the approach is not a funding instrument in itself, it is meant to provide a framework and strategy and encourage a division of labour among humanitarian and development actors that can be supported by existing humanitarian and development financial tools, for example the EU Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) and the trust fund for the Central African Republic.

The approach is currently being piloted in Ethiopia through a programme called RESET, for which the humanitarian and development offices within the EU (ECHO and DEVCO) develop joint analysis, assessments and strategies which are implemented in the mid- and long-term, based on an agreed division of labour between the two offices and their partners, and funded using a mix of financial tools. RESET aims at complementing or even integrating some of its activities into ongoing government and multilateral resilience programs such as e.g. the Productive Safety Net Program in Ethiopia.

basis, according to what principles and under whose authority decisions should be made about the allocation of resources in protracted crises. It becomes more difficult to establish objectives and criteria on which to base decisions in these environments without an established presence on the ground (Harmer and Macrae, 2004). Countering the effects of highly politicised settings on aid requires devolving decision-making and programming to the lowest organisational level, where there is better information and potentially the greatest knowledge of what is happening on the ground (Natsios, 2010).

Several governments are experimenting with decentralised development planning, analysis and decision-making, including DFID, SDC, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and Australia's DFAT, although only SDC and SIDA have dedicated humanitarian expertise in embassy offices.

There has been some positive feedback in this regard. SDC requires country offices to undertake joint scenario planning and outcome identification three times a year. This has allowed SDC humanitarian and development staff and partners to begin to work in more joined up ways in places like the Horn of Africa and the Middle East,

where the regional programme was designed jointly by humanitarian, development, political and human security. By contrast, a recent evaluation of Dutch engagement in South Sudan found that its ability to support principled humanitarian action at country level was limited by a lack of understanding, experience and knowledge of humanitarian policy debates and priorities among regular embassy staff (Poole, forthcoming).

Devolving prioritisation and decision-making would require donor institutions to beef up their country-level staff presence, particularly with humanitarian expertise or, where that is not possible or feasible, by investing in country-level multilateral agencies and funds. While more analysis is needed to determine whether decentralisation of donor decision-making can be efficient as well as effective, there is evidence that investment in pooled funds has advantages, particularly for smaller donors in difficult settings (Bayat and Glenmarec, 2014). In Afghanistan, for example, some of the most successful programmes, including the basic package of health services and the national solidarity programme, were financed through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).

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### 3.5 Find more sustainable financing models

Addressing the challenges of protracted crises requires an approach to funding that mixes and matches different financing instruments tailored to different types of contexts, including balancing bilateral aid with more substantial investment in multilateral global and country-based pooled funds (Poole, 2014).<sup>10</sup>

Despite some laudable initiatives by donors to increase the flexibility of their funding schemes, a recent study by UNDP's Multi-Donor Trust Fund Office, which surveyed donor practices in several countries, found that current financing practices still reinforce a siloed approach to recovery efforts (Renoux and Glemarec, 2014). Here, social protection, cash transfer programmes and risk financing have proven successful in bringing actors together around common technical problems. For example, an evaluation of a multiple-agency cash-based food assistance programme in the DRC supported food needs according to people's priorities and preferences by being context-specific, holistic and closely coordinated with other assistance (Bailey, 2014).

Taking vulnerability as a starting point also requires a focus on future risks, rather than past needs. This requires that donors move away from a reactive funding model to an approach that seeks to anticipate, plan for and hedge against future risks. At a minimum this requires a 'risk-informed' approach that supports financial and programmatic preparedness, the collection and active monitoring of data indicators, sufficient funding of early response and incentives for partners to engage in joint risk analysis and prioritisation exercises at the country level (Swithern, 2014).

There may also be opportunities for donors to play a role in promoting alternative forms of risk financing in protracted crises, particularly in large-scale but predictable crises such as cyclical droughts and floods, where non-traditional models are required and where a wider array of actors can help. Risk financing and risk transfer involve putting in place strategies to ensure the availability of funds for post-disaster relief and reconstruction, commensurate with the scale and frequency of anticipated risks.

The best-known of such approaches involves extending credit schemes or putting in place insurance schemes in high-risk countries. Donors have an important role to play in risk financing as 'first movers', providing catalytic investments in new approaches and markets where private sector actors might not otherwise engage. Donors can also play an important role as match-makers and facilitators, creating opportunities and incentives for public, private and civil society actors to connect and develop partnerships. For example, in 2013 Japan established a contingent credit line, SECURE, to provide immediate

liquidity to partner countries eligible for Japanese ODA loans following a disaster. The use of risk financing tools, which rely on a degree of government cooperation and engagement, is trickier in crisis situations where conflict is involved. More analysis and investigation should be done to assess the appropriateness and adaptability of risk financing tools for protracted conflict situations (Poole, 2014).

### 3.6 Align programmatic goals with organisational incentives

Bringing more coherence to donor approaches to protracted crises means creating the right incentives for reorienting donor behaviour. At a technical level, this will entail integrating humanitarian activities at country level into development accountability and results frameworks and partnership agreements, including indicators for the effective management of coordinated relief and development activities.

Such positive incentives should also extend to career development: hiring, staffing, training and performance management in order to diversify skill sets, improve the knowledge base and bridge cultural divides between the humanitarian and development worlds. This includes recruiting many more staff from outside of the civil service with field experience in a range of roles and contexts. The Australian government, for example, has very few 'humanitarian only' posts, and so staff gain a wider range of programmatic skills. The Swiss government is moving towards making coordination and joined-up working in protracted crisis settings part of performance frameworks, but this is still some way off.

Perhaps more importantly, linking up humanitarian and development activities is also helped by getting politics on side. This does not mean using humanitarian or development activities for political gain. Rather, it means linking humanitarian and development objectives with wider policy objectives based on a clear understanding of local politics and power relations, to ensure buy-in at highest levels of government.

Donors speak about the positive outcomes of such integration in terms of bringing more political and diplomatic weight to bear on humanitarian emergencies, particularly emergencies outside immediate national priorities. For example, the fact that the Danish aid agency DANIDA and the Minister of Cooperation Development receive 'popular support and understanding in parliament, civil society and among opinion leaders' in Denmark means that it is much easier to persuade political representatives and the public to support and endorse new missions, including in fragile states where the risks and difficulties are very high (OECD, 2011). The government of

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10 For example, global funds such as the UN-administered Central Emergency Response Fund and Peacebuilding Fund and country-based funds such as multi-donor trust funds, common humanitarian funds and transition and reconstruction funds.

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Australia cited its co-sponsorship of a UN Security Council resolution on Syria and putting crises such as Somalia on the table in foreign affairs discussions as positive examples of where humanitarian and political objectives can work together to good effect. While this is easier to do when a single minister oversees the humanitarian-development-political portfolio, it can also be achieved with more focused and coordinated prioritisation, messaging and public relations efforts to manage public expectations and shore up popular support for overseas engagements.

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# 4. Adaptation and change: the humanitarian donor of the future

Humanitarian crises, today and in the future, will continue to pose complex, costly and persistent problems that will not be solved through short-term or incremental measures or approaches that fail to question the structures, sectors and silos already in place in donor aid agencies. Addressing current needs while supporting increased resilience and improved prospects for development of people affected by protracted crisis – simultaneously and holistically – is possible and desirable, but requires a fundamental rethinking by aid agencies about the way they approach and address aid.

Although this presents profound challenges to the programme planning, management and evaluation tools currently in use, this study demonstrates that the seeds of such rethinking are already in place and should be further developed, although with a stronger evidence base to determine good and bad practice and a more honest assessment of the trade-offs such changes mean, particularly in conflict situations.

Specifically, adapting donor structures, practices and behaviours to address the specific needs of protracted crises requires that the donor aid agency of the future:

- Recognises that the purpose of aid in protracted crises is not to further national interests, but to end the cycle of vulnerability and stress for people and the institutions that support them. This should be acknowledged and accepted by donor governments and supported through increased acceptance and understanding of the different principles and approaches underpinning different forms of aid, joint context analysis and problem definition, and the identification of a coherent set of objectives across departments.
- Is transparent about the interrelation between politics, security, economics and development when making decisions about humanitarian priorities and funds, preserves humanitarian space when it is needed and brings the full skills, capacities and weight of governments to bear on protracted crises when coherence is called for. This requires gaining a better understanding of the trade-offs inherent in balancing coherence with principled aid and establishing clear red lines in crisis contexts when maintaining distinct approaches is necessary.
- Bridges architectural divides within donor institutions and partners by aligning strategies, processes and tools with the problems aid is supposed to address. This means fostering a greater sense of shared responsibility among humanitarian and development actors for assistance in long-standing crises, better articulating the ways in which short- and longer-term activities and funds can be mutually reinforcing and finding a more rational and realistic alignment of aid capacities and activities among humanitarian and development actors.
- Promotes strategic and operational coherence across government departments, including by working to comparative advantage and aligning strategies, performance management frameworks and monitoring accordingly. This requires that humanitarian and development teams develop a better understanding of their respective principles, approaches, processes and tools, work together and more regularly and systematically at country level to develop joint vulnerability and risk analysis, prioritise activities and set and monitor common country-level objectives.
- Aligns performance and career incentives with coherent programme objectives. This includes prioritising formal and informal cross-functional training and relationship-building across teams, developing performance indicators that prioritise cross-functional working and collaboration.
- Shifts fully from a centralised to a decentralised model of decision-making and action that enables more local responses to crises. While deploying humanitarian and development experts to embassies may not be possible or feasible in all circumstances and for all donors, such decentralisation could be achieved by investing in country-level multilateral agencies and funds.
- Enables a mix of proactive and reactive funding and financing tools that combine traditional aid giving with

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mechanisms and tools that anticipate and hedge against financial risk. This will require donors to continue to support the bulk of humanitarian and development assistance through traditional grants, particularly for financial and programmatic preparedness and early response. It will also mean catalysing the development and use of alternative forms of financing by enabling public, private and civil society actors to connect and develop partnerships around risk financing.

- Recognises that finding solutions to protracted crises is fundamentally a political issue and beyond the remit and intention of aid organisations and action. While it is very important that donor aid priorities and decisions in such situations are informed by a sophisticated understanding of donor foreign policy objectives, local political dynamics and power relations, such assistance, and humanitarian action in particular, should not substitute for efforts to achieve political solutions, which require the full extent of political will, courage, capacity and resources of donor governments.

There is much circumspection but also a fair amount of hope that the momentum generated by the global development processes and the World Humanitarian Summit will galvanise states and humanitarian and development actors to adapt their approaches, operations and partnerships to bring new coherence and effectiveness to aid. Donors should capitalise on this enthusiasm and review and realign their policies, operations and relationships at a time when others are involved in similar introspection and are open to change.

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## List of interviewees

- Tensai Afshaw, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
- Dominique Albert, European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO)
- Martin Barber, former UN senior official and author, *Blinded by Humanity* (2014)
- Lisa Dougherty, Irish Aid
- Jessica Eliasson, Swedish International Development Coordination Agency (SIDA)
- Waleed Elobeid, Ministry of International Cooperation and Development (MICAD), United Arab Emirates
- Mags Gaynor, Irish Aid
- Jette Michaelsen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark
- Rachel Scott, Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
- Natasha Smith, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia (DFAT)
- Thomas Thomsen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark
- Ed Tsui, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA – ret.)
- Maurice Voyame, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

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